

## THE NARRATIVES OF THE WALKING ON THE SEA.

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(Read April 18, 1907.)

The narratives of the walking on the sea are found in the first, second and fourth gospels, but not in the third: in the latter, however, this miracle is not merely omitted; there is what seems to me a significant substitute: or perhaps I should rather say a readjustment in the order of events. The passages are Mt. 14: 22 ff., Mk. 6: 45 ff., Jn. 6: 16 ff. Cf. Lk. 9, 18-20.

In all three gospels the narrative follows the miraculous feeding of the 5000, this latter miracle also precedes the passage referred to in Luke. The miracle of the feeding occurs in a desert place on the shores of Lake Gennesaret; the walking on the sea in the departure thence by water, the general impression conveyed being that the boat crosses to the other side of the lake, though there are difficulties as to this. Before taking this up, we may enquire how the company came to this desert place.

In Matthew 14 we are told of the beheading of John the Baptist and in v. 12 we read of his burial by *his* disciples, who thereupon reported the fact (*ἀπήγγειλαν*) to Jesus, who upon this news received withdraws by boat to the desert place *privately*: hearing of his departure crowds from the towns follow him by land: the place, therefore, might be approached either way.

In Mark 6:30 Jesus's own disciples return from the mission on which he had sent them and report to him (*ἀπήγγειλαν*, the same word employed by Matthew) their experiences; whereupon he proposes that they go *privately* to a desert place and take a little much needed rest: this is done by boat: again crowds find this out and follow them *up by land* from all the towns, even *getting the start of them* (an important point).

In Luke 9:10 the apostles returned from their mission and recount (*διηγήσαντο*) all their adventures; hereupon (without reason

assigned) our Lord takes them with him and withdraws to "a desert place of a city called Bethsaida," or according to the better text "into a city called Bethsaida": in any case there is *no boat*, no crossing of the lake; the place is apparently *in* Bethsaida (its territory, of course) on the *west shore*: this at once raises the question, as to which scholars are not at one, whether there was really such a second Bethsaida; for Bethsaida Julias was on the east shore. The crowds notice the withdrawal and follow: again, how is not said.

In John 6:1 we read: Thereafter (a quite indefinite note of time) Jesus departed *across* the sea of Galilee, and a large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he had wrought upon those that were sick.

The disagreement of Matthew with all the others is very noticeable and is emphasized by the word ἀπήγγειλαν which appears both in his account and in that of Mark as well as by the difference of subject—John's disciples in Matthew, Jesus's disciples in Mark. To be noted also is the fact that the story of John's taking off immediately precedes both in Matthew and Mark, but in the latter is detached from any connection with what follows; while in Luke what precedes is a parenthetical account of Herod's perplexity because of the news he had begun to hear of Jesus: "Herod said: John I beheaded: but who is this," and also (which is significant, as we shall see) the speculations of others: "John has risen from the dead"; "Elias has appeared"; "one of the ancient prophets has risen again." In John's account this feature of John the baptist does not appear: no reason at all is assigned for our Lord's withdrawal with his disciples.

Now we come to the getting away from the "desert place": We will take Mark's account first, 6:45: Instantly he *compelled* (ἠνάγκασε) his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead *across the lake* to Bethsaida (in Luke they were in or near Bethsaida), and leave him to dismiss the crowd: Then, having dismissed the crowd, he went away *into the mountain to pray*. At a late hour they in their boat were in the midst of the sea and he was on the land. They were having a hard time (he saw them) with their rowing, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night (3 a. m.) he approached them, walking on the sea.—So far

Matthew and Mark agree, and John differs only in giving Capernaum, instead of Bethsaida, as the goal of their sail.—From what direction does he approach? From behind or from in front? A question of some importance: Matthew gives no indication, nor, perhaps, does John, but Mark implies very clearly that the approach is from behind; for he goes on to say ἤθελε παρελθεῖν αὐτοῖς. They see him, take him for a spectre and cry out in fright: he quiets them with a word and gets into the boat, wereupon the wind fell (Matthew has added before this the episode of St. Peter's attempt at walking on the water). They were quite beside themselves with astonishment: οὐ γὰρ συνήκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, for their heart was hardened. They push on till they get across and land. Now what does οὐ γὰρ συνήκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις mean? As it stands and where it stands it is, I think, quite meaningless: it was evidently thought to mean something; and indeed, as we shall see, did mean something: it is in fact, I believe, a part of the original tradition which has got misplaced and so lost its meaning; for, really, it has none at all here. There is, of course, no objection to taking συνήκαν absolutely; any verb in Greek may be so used; but then the context must make the application clear, as it does not in this case. And ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, what shall we do with these words? It has been said that the sense is: the miracle of the feeding should have taught them a lesson that would have prevented all surprise at the walking on the water, but that this lesson had not been learned: but this looks like a desperate attempt to explain the inexplicable; and observe here that Matthew's story of Peter's attempt at imitating the feat quite contradicts this interpretation. I may say, here, that while I believe συνήκαν genuine, but misplaced; I also believe that ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις should be τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, for, as we shall see, what the disciples failed to understand was *what followed the feeding of the 5000*. If ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις be taken as equivalent to περὶ τῶν ἄρτων, as they may, the words are still out of place.

Looking back at Mark's account, we observe that Jesus *hurried his disciples away* with a view to dismissing the crowd: there seems no rationally assignable reason for this method of action. Then our Lord goes up into the mountain to pray: at last we have come to something that is suggestive. Jesus's praying is only thrice re-

corded in Mark: at his first day's work in Capernaum: here; and in the garden of Gethsemane: the first and last mark critical moments. Matthew has this instance and that in Gethsemane: critical moment this last. Luke has mention of Jesus praying at his baptism; at his choosing the twelve; at the Messianic confession; at the transfiguration; when he teaches his disciples to pray: all of them, each in its way, critical moments: there is besides solitary prayer in 5:16, which may be, though it is not clearly so, a critical moment. We may then conclude that the present moment was such a crisis in our Lord's history; just such a moment as would remain fixed forever in people's minds, though (for that very reason) the circumstances might come to be confused and would be very likely to be exaggerated; and with the tendencies then and there prevalent this exaggeration could not help taking the form of miracle, not absolutely invented, however, but springing out of misunderstanding of attendant facts. This will become clearer, if we can, as I think we can, discover the nature of the crisis. The phrase *οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν* expresses really the attitude at the time of the disciples in the face of this crisis: they did *not* understand it: perhaps, then it is no wonder that Mark did not either.

Let us look at Matthew. All is as in Mark barring three things: (1) Jesus has no thought of passing them: (2) St. Peter will try to walk on the water too (here is exaggeration palpably setting in): (3) So far from showing any misunderstanding or unbelieving wonder, the disciples rather adore the Lord as he enters the vessel and cry aloud "Truly thou art the Son of God." Does not this give us a hint of the critical event, which in the confused tradition that came to Mark had been lost?

But let us look further. Luke has nothing of this walking on the sea, but he has before the feeding of the 5,000 the speculations (Messianic in tendency) of various unnamed persons connected with Herod's court and perhaps outside it; and then after it comes (9: 18-20) a record without note of time or place of an event that by Matthew and Mark is given at a later date and in a definite place, viz. at Cæsarea Philippi. And this event is nothing but the Messianic confession made by St. Peter in the name of all the disciples. Compare this with the words just quoted from Matthew, and the

conclusion seems inevitable that the critical event that is at the bottom of the whole narrative, the event which Mark lost and Matthew put in in an unintelligent way, was the confession of the Messiahship of Jesus. Yet were both Matthew and Luke, as well as Mark misled here: for this was the very thing (had Mark only known it) that the disciples "did not understand"; whereas in Matthew and Luke (though there are great differences) they do seem to have understood it. Matthew's mistake is in putting this confession in the mouths of his disciples; Luke's in antedating the scene at Cæsarea Philippi, with suppression, necessitated thereby, of the name of the place.

The account in John may help us out here (6:14). After the miracle of the feeding the *crowd* said: "this is truly the prophet, he that is to come" (Cf. Matthew 11:3 when this phrase is used of the expected Messiah) into the world." Jesus saw they were for coming and seizing him "to make him king, and so he withdrew into the mountain in solitude." He does not dismiss the crowd, but flees from their premature intent of proclaiming him Messiah in their own sense. Separation even from his disciples for the moment seemed demanded by the critical situation: he had discerned the purpose of the crowd and left before they had time to declare it; at the same time in a plausible way he got his disciples away from the contagion of the crowd, to which they might have succumbed and thus interfered with his wiser and more prudent plans. The disciples embark and start *across* the lake for Capernaum (not Bethsaida, as Mark has it). After dark there came a high wind and the sea rose. They had made 25 or 30 stadia when they saw Jesus walking *ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης*: as he neared the ship, they got scared; but he quieted them: *they* wanted (*ἤθελον*) to take him aboard and instantly their boat was at the shore they were making for. In Mark (alone) we read Jesus wanted (*ἤθελεν*) to pass by them (and did not); in John *they* wanted (*ἤθελον*) to take him into the ship, but we are *not* told that he got in. This identity of the verb (*ἤθελεν-ἤθελον*), though with a different reference, can hardly be accidental. This one word seems to point to identity of original and to the misunderstanding and its cause. Jesus did *not* enter the ship: therefore he did *not* walk on the sea: he was walking on the

shore, on the beach close to and toward the waters edge. ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης may perfectly well mean this, though it *may* have the other meaning also: but only this interpretation seems to cover all the facts as given by John. They have rowed, they don't know precisely how far: they guess 25 or 30 furlongs, but are nearer shore, as the event proves, than they had supposed. Jesus had been alone in the mountain (he had not stayed to dismiss the crowd, therein Matthew and Mark are mistaken, he was too eager to get away from their dangerous presence): after dark, towards morning in fact, he makes his way down to the shore at the point where he looked for his disciples to land (Matthew and Mark both speak of his seeing the boat from the land), thus imitating in the reverse direction the movements of the crowds, when they followed him (and got ahead of him, we remember) to the "desert place." The disciples see him as he approaches the shore and comes nearer to them: they may have thought that he was actually beyond the shore line (they probably did) and coming out to them: they are frightened and, when quieted by his assurance that it is he, their master, they wanted to get him on board; so they put on a spurt in their eagerness and before they knew it (having miscalculated their distance probably in the dim light) they were at the land and there was their Lord. This same conclusion has been reached (but on insufficient grounds) by J. Weiss in his *Life of Christ* and by Edwin A. Abbott in his *Johannin* grammar solely on syntactical grounds. The confusion in the tradition, shown by the accounts in Matthew and Mark and the omission by Luke, entirely due to a misunderstanding of what happened, arose in all likelihood from the fact that Jesus hurried (ἠνάγκασε in Matthew and Mark) his disciples away, and hence they were perplexed—did not understand. τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις = what followed the miracle of the feeding. The wonderful scene they had just witnessed, the abrupt way in which their master fairly drove them into the boat and made them push off, put them into a state of mind where senses and memory at once were likely to play them false, and this seems to have happened.

The clear result is, that there appears to have been a risk of Jesus being seized and proclaimed as Messiah in what may be called the temporary and political sense; this was to run counter to

his purposes, hopes and beliefs and must be somehow escaped. That a critical fact occurred at this time the tradition as given in the synoptics recognized, but the nature of it was missed and the miracle came in to fill the gap; the way being opened for it by the strong, but confused impression made by the whole series of events on the minds of the eyewitnesses, whose senses in the excitement deceived them or were misinterpreted afterwards. Their confusion remained on record in the enigmatical *οὐ γὰρ συνήκαν* of Mark, and the real fact in the transposition of the Messianic confession of Luke.

The significant words about which the whole story crystallized would seem to be: *ἠνάγκασε — ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος — αὐτὸς ἦν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς — εἶδεν αὐτοὺς — ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης — ἤθελεν (ἤθελον) — οὐ γὰρ συνήκαν — ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις.*